AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for separating letters in which irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt ~~(1)~~ are rendered into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt ~~(1),~~

~~characterized in that~~, the method comprising rotating

at least one retention plate ~~(15)~~ affixed at an axis of rotation ~~(12)~~ in a radial orientation with respect thereto ~~rotates~~ around the axis of rotation ~~(12)~~ that is arranged crosswise to ~~the~~ a conveying direction of the conveyor belt ~~(1)~~, horizontally and above the conveyor belt ~~(1)~~ in such a way that ~~the~~ a retention plate ~~(15)~~ situated below the axis of rotation ~~(12)~~ has a speed component in a direction ~~that is opposite~~ opposed to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt ~~(1)~~.

2. (Currently Amended) The method according to Claim 1,

~~characterized in that~~ comprising rotating

several retention plates ~~(15, 15') rotate~~ around the axis of rotation ~~(12)~~.

3. (Currently Amended) The method according to ~~one or more of the preceding claims,~~

~~characterized in that~~ claim 1, comprising varying

the distance between the axis of rotation ~~(12)~~ and the conveyor belt ~~(1) is varied~~.

4. (Currently Amended) A device for separating letters that renders irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt ~~(1)~~ into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt ~~(1),~~

~~characterized in that~~, the device comprising

~~it has~~ an axis of rotation ~~(12)~~ that is arranged crosswise to ~~the~~ a conveying direction of a conveyor belt ~~(1)~~, horizontally and above the conveyor belt ~~(1)~~, and one or more retention plates ~~(15, 15') that are~~ affixed at the axis of rotation ~~(12)~~ in a radial orientation with respect thereto and ~~that rotate~~ rotatable around said axis of rotation ~~(12)~~, ~~whereby~~ wherein the rotating retention plates ~~(15, 15')~~ can be driven in such a way that, in at least one operating state of the device, they have a speed component that is opposite to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt ~~(1)~~ whenever they are below the axis of rotation ~~(12)~~.

5. (Currently Amended) The device according to Claim 4,

~~characterized in that~~ wherein

~~the~~ angular distances between the retention plates ~~(15, 15')~~ are the same.

6. (Currently Amended) The device according to ~~one or both of Claims~~ Claim 4 ~~and 5,~~

~~characterized in that~~, wherein

one or more of the retention plates ~~(15')~~ has a smaller extension in the radial direction relative to the axis of rotation ~~(12)~~ than at least one other retention plate (15).

7. (Currently Amended) The device according to ~~one or more of Claims~~ Claim 4 ~~to 6,~~

~~characterized in that~~, wherein

an end piece ~~(16)~~ of at least one of the retention plates ~~(15)~~ is configured elastically in alignment with the radius relative to the rotational movement of the retention plates (15, 15').